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THE HINDU UNIVERSITY

Some miles to the south of Benares City and half a-mile removed from the holy river, rises a collection of buildings of unique interest, both as a substantial fulfilment of visions heroically pursued, and as a pledge of undying faith in the future.

In the short space of some fifteen years, fair buildings have been erected; Colleges of Arts, Science, Engineering, with Hostels for each, and last—but not least—a fully equipped Ladies' College have already served thousands of students. Never in the history of the world, even in America, has a university grown to maturity so rapidly! Never probably also has one had so many obstacles to encounter, so many thorns and encumbrances, literal and metaphorical, to clear from the site. India has never been a land of sudden transformations, and though colossal tasks, have been there achieved and dreams of beauty realised, as the carving of cave-temples or the framing of a Taj Mahal, these have been the works of patient centuries of devotion, or else of the boundless resources of an Emperor, between whose dream and its fulfilment nothing could stand. But for this great enterprise its promoters had no bottomless purse into which to dip, but must beg from an impoverished public, convince an unwilling Government of the need of support, cajole the few rich whose generosity is barely equal to the present demands on them. Yet India could not wait, and the work began and has continued.

Such as it stands to-day, it is the work pre-eminently of two; Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the silver-tongued Hindi Brahmin and national leader of the United Provinces,

and Dr. Annie Besant. Each of these dreamed a dream, not quite alike, nor yet altogether unlike. At least they were sufficiently compatible to be blended when national necessity seemed to demand a more speedy fulfilment than either could achieve for their respective ideals, and in allowing Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's dream to take first place and bending all her energies to help him, Dr. Annie Besant acted as the true Karma-Yogin that she had always been. Yet her dream is there too, and to understand what the Hindu University is and will be, we must try to understand both of these creative thinkers.

Annie Besant's Early Life.

It was no life of ease and tranquillity which had prepared Annie Besant for the great work she had to do in India.

Born in 1847, of English and Irish parents, the early death of her father had left a widowed mother in somewhat straitened circumstances. Nevertheless she had had a happy childhood, prolonged until the rude awakening brought about by an unsuitable marriage into which foolish social conditions and a quixotically tender conscience had trapped her inexperienced girlhood Then followed a long fight for freedom, both of thought and conscience, which ended in her repudiating Christianity or at least that harsh creed which it represented to her husband, and in consequence her being divorced and deprived of the custody of her two children.

Though almost maddened by this cruel and unnatural deprivation, she found it impossible to compromise with truth as she saw it, and she bravely took up her world's challenge, and threw in her lot with the socially ostracized free thinkers and atheists, who laboured to overthrow hypocrisy and false conventions, while also seeking to help the poor and oppressed. Love of man took the place of love of God to Bradlaugh and his friends, and perhaps the two were

not so much unlike as the orthodox Christians seemed then to consider them.

Earning with difficulty a scanty living, for herself and her mother by journalism and other work, Annie Besant did yet find time to join the Fabian Society of which George Bernard Shaw was also a member, to lecture frequently on socialistic and free-thinking platforms, and to champion the cause of women labourers and poor London school children. Many a fight had she waged and won, and had become famous as a lecturer and social reformer, being a member of the first London School Board, helping Bradlaugh in his political struggles, collaborating with W. T. Stead and other men of note.

A Recruit To Theosophy

Then Madame Blavatsky, the Russian founder of the Theosophical Society, came into her life. She had been asked by Stead to review The Secret Doctrine for him ; and struck at once as by long familiar truths, she sought out the Seeress and offered herself as disciple, being joyfully accepted. There again no half measures were possible to her uncompromising truthfulness, and though it meant the painful breaking of many a tie of friendship, she did not hesitate once the light was seen.

Henceforth, until Madame Blavatsky's death, she had been her most devoted pupil and friend, and her magnificent power of oratory was entirely at the service of the Theosophical Society, for which she was lecturing in America when Madame Blavatsky died.

Even before these Theosophical days she had in public championed the cause of India, but now much more were her thoughts and desires rivetted on the Sacred Land whence light had come to the west. Colonel Olcott, the President

Founder of the Theosophical Society, invited her in 1891, and she came two years later, to settle in Benares.

Her early work in Benares

At once Annie Besant fell under the spell of a Motherland to which she felt more spiritually attuned than to the land of her last western birth. At once she set herself, with the indomitable energy which had always characterised her, to work for the regeneration of sacred Aryavarta, land of heroes, saints and philosophers.

So great has been the change of late that it is difficult to realise how hopeless appeared the situation then to the best of India's sons. They had lost faith in themselves, their culture and religion. Western materialism had penetrated their keen intellects like a blight, the more deadly in its effects because reinforced by the demonstrable superiority of its exemplars in all that makes for worldly success. Taught in their schools to regard themselves as belonging to a conquered race, yet subconsciously refusing, by a right instinct, to imitate in all things their complacent rulers, young men were sullenly apathetic or else seething in impotent anger which would some day burst forth into violence. The first need was therefore some reform in education; schools and colleges which would primarily suit the nation's need, foster a healthy patriotism and self-respect, and most of all encourage indigenous lines of culture, philosophy and religion instead of foreign ones.

Birth of the C. H. C.

So the Central Hindu Collage came into existence, with a Boys' School attached, and very soon another for girls. Money came as if miraculously for land-purchase and buildings, for hands that have learnt freely to give are never left

empty. Enthusiastic workers gathered round her, learned scholars like Babu Bhagavan Das, young University men like Mr. B. Sanjiva Rao, now Principal of Queen's College, Pandit Iqbal Narain Gurutu, and the two brothers P. K. and D. K. Telang, sons of a noble and famous father. George S. Arundale came from Cambridge to be Principal, and threw himself whole-heartedly into the scheme, and it flourished exceedingly. The keynotes there sounded were two, patriotism and self-sacrificing service, and if both of these terms have been of late almost nauseatingly over-used, that fact is in itself a measure of their success and usefulness at that time.

It may be answered that the latter, at least, was far from new; that noble missionaries from western lands had long made India the field of their self-sacrificing efforts. True! No one need seek to depreciate the work done by such in the past, and still being done at present, especially among the lower classes of India. But educationally their work suffered from one fatal defect that was absent from the Central Hindu College; and that was and is the conscious superiority which is necessarily inherent in the missionary mind. Even if, at best, the missionary teacher has trained himself to maintain a respectful silence towards his pupils' faith and habits, in his heart he slights them, and what is bred in the heart will burst forth in behaviour, even if denied expression in words. Besides, can there be true education where there is division in sympathy over the deepest concerns of life between teacher and taught? The more loveable and beloved the missionary teacher, the more likely that his students would be attracted to adopt his faith and outlook on life, so cutting themselves adrift from their natural environment; while those who resisted this temptation would protect themselves by hardening their minds against the teacher's influence, so making his efforts to help them vain.

The C.H.C. no Missionary Institution.

From this defect the Central Hindu College was entirely free, for Annie Besant and her western helpers came to India filled with an earnest desire to learn of her deep stores of spiritual wisdom, rather than to impart anything. It is true that they would impart, for the West had something to give the East; but it would be given under no sense of condescension and superiority, but with a real humility, such as a youngster might feel who had to teach a learned elder the dexterity of a typewriter. Full of eager admiration for Indian religious philosophy, looking on Indian soil as sacred because trodden, not only by sages and saints of old, but by the living masters of wisdom who had sent H. B. Blavatsky as their messenger to the west, those Europeans and Americans, did not need to repress instincts of superiority, though some of them might grieve to see the many signs of physical degeneration and diseased social conditions under which India was suffering.

In the face of this genuine feeling shown by strangers, the passionate love of their Motherland which slumbers in every Indian heart awoke to a joyful intensity that made patriotism almost in itself a religion, or at least a binding force that transcended the limitations of sects and communities. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain and Christian studied, played and ate together as brother Indians, and even finally came to pray together, each listening respectfully to prayers in which he could not join, and recognizing what was common in the aims of worship. To correct the preponderant bias towards intellectual pursuits, boys and youths were encouraged to distinguish themselves rather in social services, both within their College circle and outside, so that soon the C. H. C. student was known all over India for his readiness to help, his courtesy and joyous self-confidence.

Dangers in the Path

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in those days was to preserve moderation, to rouse and foster self-respect and patriotism without stimulating hatred in place of the fear of the foreigner that had hitherto held them in check. No evil sowing can fail to bear evil fruit, so it was inevitable that violent feelings would sometimes find expression and win adherents, and that dark dreams of revenge would be fostered in some young hearts whose eyes had been opened to the woes of their country and their immediate causes. But generally, just because these feelings were not repressed but could be freely debated, because wholesome outlet was provided for the more active leaders in forms of social service, and most of all perhaps because of the personal influence of their beloved Vasanta Mata, no catastrophe occurred even in days of most seething political unrest, and Mrs. Besant could refuse special police protection on the occasion of the Viceroy's visit, claiming proudly that the students themselves would guard His Excellency's safety—a faith that was justified!

Happy Students of the C. H. C.

Those were happy days! Inspired by Mr. Arundale's enthusiasm and their own desire to serve their country's truer needs, many a young man of good family and great promise renounced a career in Government service or the fat fees of a lawyer, to take up the profession of teaching, and schools sprang up all over India, for girls as well as boys, based on C. H. C. principles and methods, and achieving many of its beneficial results. It is not too much to claim that the tone of average schools throughout the country has been considerably changed and uplifted by these models, with their reliance on love and brotherliness instead of fear, and their encouragement of Scouting and other forms of social services and citizen training.

Mrs. Besant's Departure from Benares.

After some years Anne Besant was called in 1906 to take up permanent residence at Adyar, the official headquarters of the Theosophical Society of which she had become President, and thenceforth she could only pay occasional visits to the Central Hindu College; but she left a worthy representative in G. S. Arundale, who seemed endowed with indomitable energy and miraculous power of inspiring youth. Shanti Kunja, Mrs. Besant's house, remained the living centre of her influence, and when two or three times a year she would come to occupy it, the students would flock to the station, or to the junction of Mogal Sarai, to meet and bring her in truimphant procession, with songs of Vasanta Mata-ki-Jai.

About 1911 some differences arose between Mr. Arundale and some other members of the governing body of the Central Hindu College, which led to the former resigning his principalship. Other Thesophical workers also resigned, from College and School, and the Theosophical Schools, for boys and girls severally, were started within the compound of the Theosophical Society, separate from but maintaining friendly relations with the Central Hindu College and its schools.

Rise of National Movement.

Annie Besant had long dreamt of developing the Central Hindu College into an All India University, in which student of all creeds and castes might study, and learn to transcend their communal differences by friendly intercourse and social service. But in 1914 she started the big forward movement towards national Self-Government, and while all must agree that this was prolific of good to India, it had inevitably some awkward concomitants. An "Awakened India" became self-conscious not only as a whole, but unfortunately too in its component and only too separative

parts. Despite all efforts of the greater leaders, and especially of Mrs. Annie Besant, to get Hindus and Moslems to unite in Congress work, communal differences began to get more acute as the prospect of Home Rule made each community more eager to have its claims to power acknowledged.

Considering India's past history this was inevitable, and on the whole has reached less serious dimensions than might have been expected; but nevertheless it came in the way of the development of Annie Besant's scheme for an All-Indian University at Benares. The Mussalmans had started a University at Aligarh, and some prominent Hindu leaders, notably Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, thought it necessary on their side, to have a specifically Hindu University, to preserve the vital elements of their own culture. Not that it was to be an exclusive institution, for students of all creeds and both sexes might be admitted; but the study of Sanskrit was to be obligatory, and orthodox Hinduism, though in its more enlightened forms, would here erect its stronghold against all that threatened its long domination, from Western materialism to rival Indian creeds and reform movements.

Benares Hindu University Planned.

That such an university should be situated in Benares seemed emimently right and proper, and the trustees of the Central Hindu College, led by Annie Besant with her usual generosity, freely offered the college and its two constituent schools to form a nucleus of the new University, which could not get a charter sanctioned by Government without at least one full-grown institution to provide it with "a local habitation" in addition to a name. The time was not yet ripe for a National Indian University such as Mrs. Besant had planned. That was to be tried again later at Adyar, and was again to fail, for want of adequate public support. But out of such failures success will ultimately come, and India will one day turn from her childish insistence on communal

differences, and realise how much trouble she would have spared herself if she could have risen to the height of those opportunities.

Move from the old C. H. C.

The old site of the Central Hindu College, separated by a narrow road from the headquarters of the Indian section of the Theosophical Society, was incapable of extension into a university, and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and his friends had big plans. A site was chosen at Nagwa, some miles removed from the city, on the river bank, opposite the palace of the Maharaja of Benares, and there the Foundation Stone of the Benares Hindu University was laid in February, 1916. A brilliant gathering of Maharajahs and Rajahs, whose princely donations had made the inauguration possible, of sages, patriots and interested strangers graced the function—Mr. Gandhi was there, fresh with laurels of his S. African victory. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mrs. Annie Besant were honoured and congratulated as the father and mother respectively of the infant university; the former labouring up and down India to win means for its support, the latter giving substance of her own creation, a home for the embryo.

So a beginning was made! But not at once did the Central Hindu College move from its old quarters.

Unprecedented floods in the Ganges proved the situation chosen too close to the river, and the foundation stone itself had to be moved further inland. The plans were huge, and in those days of war prices, expenditure always had to exceed pre-estimates. But the work began and progressed with a speed almost incredible to one who knew something of the difficulties encountered. In a few years an Engineering College was in full swing, Principal King having been so imbued with enthusiasm by Pandit Malaviya's organising capacity and leadership that he had come to reside in a half finished bungalow, so as personally to hasten the completion of the

necessary hostels and workshops. Soon the Arts College was ready with its hostels and houses for professors, and half-reluctantly these moved from their old quarters. It was quite an undertaking then, for a family to go to Nagwa to reside, far away from friends, in a half built and inadequately watered city, surrounded by a wilderness. But the plunge was made, the old C. H. C. was given over to a Training College and the boys' school, and appeared strangely shorn of its old glories, while at Nagwa each new Hostel was filled to overflowing as soon as built, needs were met as they arose, in true pioneer style, and the university shaped itself, more or less accurately, to the plan of its founders.

The New University To-day

As for that plan, perhaps the first thing that strikes a visitor is its spaciousness. Entering on the University land, he finds himself treading (or riding, for distances are too great for walking to be popular) one of many radiating roads, which will be fine avenues when the trees are full grown. These radiating avenues converge on a centre, where some of the principal university buildings are situated, as well as a large, open Amphitheatre. So large is the whole space, that Colleges and Hostels are often more than a mile apart, so there is ample room for playing fields, botanical gardens, dairy farm and lands for experimental agriculture. The original plan was to dig a canal from the centre straight to the Ganges, that the under-graduates might exercise themselves in rowing and swimming, but this part of the scheme has not yet materialised.

Admission of Women's Students

From the first a few women students attended University lectures with the men, and were admitted to all examinations, but soon money was donated for a separate Women's College which now stands close within the entrance to the University,

having its separate lady teachers up to the Intermediate examination, after which the women attend men's lectures.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malavia, who has perhaps been rather unwillingly dragged along by more enthusiastic co. workers in the path of the emancipation of women, used to announce his intention to have a high wall all round the girls and careful guardians at the gate—indeed to make it a pardah institution. But it is good to see that in this he has wisely allowed himself to be over-ruled. The wall is not conspicuously high, and the gate stands wide open on most occasions. Probably no lady members of the Staff could be found to agree to pardah conditions, and the girl students themselves would make the weight of their opinion felt, for indeed they are fully awake, and hotly resent too grand-motherly—or grand-fatherly—interference with their freedom, as daughters of New India ra ther than of old.

A characteristic feature of the Hindu University is the Sanskrit College, passing hundreds of candidates through its examinations yearly, and maintaining ancient traditions of simple life and classical methods. Also, in the Philosophy courses prescribed for B. A. and M. A., Sanskrit Philosophy for the first time in an Indian University holds its rightful place among its rival schools of the West; Principal Dhruva, too, is a great Sanskrit scholar, who may be relied on to see that the priceless treasures of Sanskrit literature are not neglected in the arts course.

Political Troubles

The University has had its share in all the variations of the National struggle. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya has exercised a moderating influence, but has not been able to prevent the invasion of the academic precincts by the war cries of the Congress and even of the communists. But dangerous extremes have been generally avoided, the worst that has happened being the enforced closing of the

Colleges during some weeks of the year 1930-31. This loss to their studies, and the loss entailed on the University by the witholding of the Governmeut grant, is perhaps not too high a price to pay for the pride they have felt in taking part, whether wisely or unwisely, in their country's struggles. It is to be hoped that the constructive work inaugurated by their leaders, including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, at the Round Table Conference, will soon bear fruit in opening up useful lines of activity to these young men, diverting them from communal jealousies and the cult of violence.

Regrets and hopes

At first sight, on reviewing the situation, one is apt to regret that the first scheme of a National Indian University, rather than a specifically Hindu one, was not adopted. Perhaps the present rift between Moslems to Hindus would not be the hindrance to freedom that it now proves if Aligarh and Benares had not fostered these separative cults in the young men that entered their gates. Yet it is also true that real co-operation can only be based on mutual respect for each other's strength: and perhaps it was too much to expect that in India, the land of rigid barriers, dividing creeds, castes and sexes, these could at a stroke be melted in the fire of national feeling.

That fire is alight and is being fostered at Benares, as doubtless also at Aligarh, and walls of prejudice are fast tottering to their fall.

Let each University succeed in producing the best types of their respective cultures, and the ideal Hindu will be the first to recognise a twin in the ideal Mussalmau, after which they will both be proud to call themselves by the national name that unites, in stead of the sectarian one that divides, two noble sons of the motherland.

India has to achieve her regeneration not, as Russia, by denying religion, but by affirming and strengthening it in transcending its weaknesses.

So the Benares Hindu University has a great future before it, a great work to do for the country, first in purifying Hinduism of its weaknesses, and then in bringing it up to date, so that it can serve the spirit of modern youth with its tolerant and international outlook. Instead of the reproach that some man puts his religion before his country, or the counter one that patriotism is made to take the place of religion, India has to teach the world that the better Hindoo *ipse facto* is the better Indian, and in the same way the better Moslem, Sikh, Jain, Christian or Buddhist, the better Indian in every case! It would be easier, doubtless, to drop religion, as too disturbing a factor in national unity; but the unity that would be so effected would be a superficial one only, leaving the depths untouched.

So, on the threshold of India's new era of full national self-consciousness, the Benares Hindu University offers to Indian students the opportunity to explore to the depths the most ancient philosophy evolved by the genius of their race, to equip themselves with its traditional wisdom, as a preparation for life's adventure. Hinduism has cradled many great Indians in the past and can cradle more in the future, and new India will be only the richer for the many faiths that have nursed her sons from of old, leading them by many paths to that point where they perceive all religions as one, the worship of the One Self within each heart.

HELEN VEALE

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